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Va. Firm Has Big Role in Oman

Ex-CIA Man's Company Guides Ministries on Gulf Peninsula

By Christopher Dickey
Washington Post Foreign Service

KHASAB, Oman—In the late 1970s, as the worldwide oil crisis heated up, an Arlington, Va., company headed by a former Central Intelligence Agency staffer came here to the remote Musandam Peninsula.

Iran lies just 26 miles away, across the strategic Strait of Hormuz, through which much of the world's oil supply is carried by a steady parade of tankers out of the Persian Gulf.

The stated business of Tetra Tech International Inc. is development. But the power it came to wield here is, in the words of one employee, "a little peculiar."

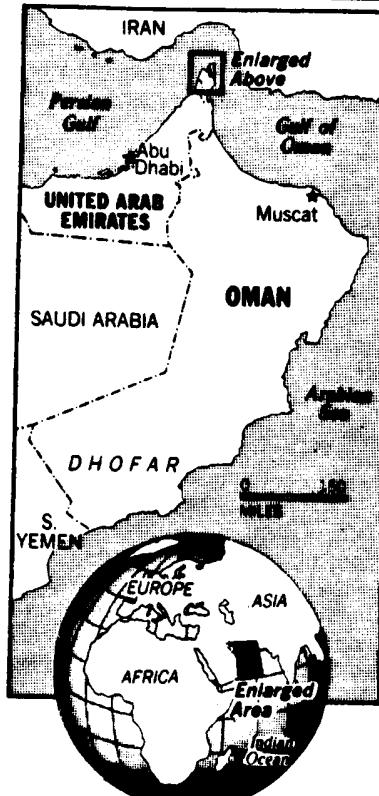
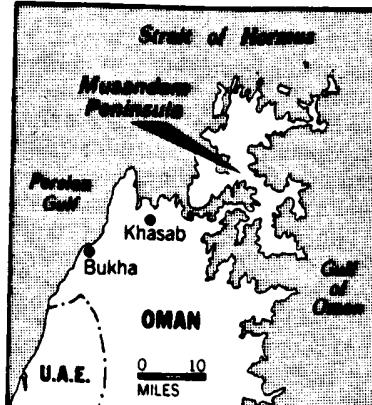
On contract with the government of Oman, TTI helped set up the Musandam Development Committee in 1976. In that capacity, it was given supervisory control in 1979 over the operations of 11 government ministries.

TTI's employees have supervised activities from road building and port construction to minor details of everyday life. They inspect the few restaurants here for hygiene. They tie up goats found wandering the streets and fine their owners.

Oman's Sultan Qaboos, often described as the United States' closest friend on the Persian Gulf and a man who has relied heavily on foreign advisers and employees in every aspect of his country's development, needed to secure the Musandam quickly and efficiently in 1979.

The strictly military aspects of that job were given to the Omani Army, much of which is commanded by British officers. At the same time, the United States began investing hundreds of millions of dollars in upgrading four Omani air bases to handle fighter and transport planes if Washington should be called on to defend the gulf. One is the Khasab field, where the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers replaced the old 2,000-foot dirt strip with a 6,500-foot runway.

Most of the rest of the work done here was carried out under TTI, whose president, James H. Critchfield, served the CIA as Mid-



BY DAVID ZUCKERMAN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

dle East desk officer and a national intelligence officer for energy until 1974, according to several published reports, including one in The New York Times last March 26, and confirmed by Critchfield, reached by telephone in Arlington last week.

In the Musandam there were special problems to which a man with such a background might be sensitive. As one British consultant to the sultan put it, Qaboos had to

keep the remote peninsula from "floating away" politically.

The Musandam, with a population of about 11,500, is separated from the rest of Oman by about 40 miles of territory of the United Arab Emirates.

Many fishermen on the coast still use the *boom*, a traditional wooden boat, to bring in their catches. The Bedouins among the crags of the mountains carry walking sticks topped with small stone axheads.

For generations tribal rivalries and feuds wracked the peninsula. Some villages until recently professed loyalty to the sheiks of the United Arab Emirates rather than to the sultan of Oman.

In Khasab, the biggest settlement, about 40 percent of the population is Iranian or of Iranian descent. Little Iranian fishing launches still move in and out of the Khasab port.

"With twin engines on the back you can bang across to Iran in an hour and a half," said a foreign worker here. Iran seems a closer neighbor than the rest of Oman.

TTI's projects are a highly sophisticated example of what soldiers like to call civic action, aimed at winning and holding the sometimes shaky allegiances of the peninsula's people. In an area such as this, development can be seen essentially as preventive medicine against subversion.

Sultan Qaboos, a graduate of Britain's Sandhurst military academy, is expert in the nuances of such undertakings.

After taking power from his father, with British encouragement, in 1970, Qaboos spent the first five years of his reign crushing a Communist-backed rebellion in the southern province of Dhofar. He was aided by British forces, including the Special Air Service and intelligence officers who put a premium on civic action.

"The Dhofar war was eventually successful," said a senior British officer in Oman's capital, Muscat, "because civil projects followed very quickly on military success."

But while Dhofar and Muscat be-

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